

Discover Birds and Blossoms Scenic Driving Tour



Planning For Your Trip:

Before you venture out on a driving tour:

- Check the Laurel Highlands Visitor Bureau website at: www.laurelhighlands.org and the state parks and forests (DCNR) website at: www.dcnr.pa.gov prior to leaving for maps and updated information.
- Check hours of operation for Powdermill Nature Reserve at 724-593-6105 or www.powdermill.org and Laurel Hill Visitor Center at 814-352-8649.
- Dress for the weather and activities. The Laurel Highlands can be eight to ten degrees cooler than other areas.
- Check for Spring and Birding Events at www.events.dcnr.pa.gov.
- Note that there is limited cell service in some areas.
- Be aware that some GPS software programs do not display coordinates accurately in this area.
- Bring maps of the driving tour, the local towns, and the Laurel Highlands area.
- Bring a camera, binoculars, bird field guide, and wildflower field guide.

The return of our feathered friends coupled with the bloom of spring flowers during the months of April, May, and June provides the perfect opportunity to explore the Laurel Highlands. This day-long driving tour will guide you to some of our area's best birding spots from a mountain top bog to the deepest gorge in Pennsylvania. This approximately 100-mile loop will take a minimum of five hours.

Directions to first stop:

- Begin at Donegal and drive PA 711 North (Laurel Highlands Scenic Byway) for approximately two miles
- Turn left onto Donegal Lake Road and drive approximately one mile
- Drive past the first parking lot on the right and turn right into the next parking lot (West Parking Lot)

Stop One – Donegal Lake

Formerly known as Fourmile Run Dam, Donegal Lake is a 90-acre impoundment located at the base of Chestnut Ridge. It is part of a 232-acre property owned and managed by the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission. The lake and emergent marsh along the water's edge provide habitat for waterfowl and other birds.

The variety of plants in and around the lake provides both food and nesting locations for waterfowl. Waterfowl feed on seeds, underground tubers, aquatic grasses and sedges, submerged pond weeds, crustaceans, clams, fish eggs, and fish. The cattails, grasses, and shrubs provide cover and protection for nests.

In North America, 75 percent of bird populations migrate between two habitats - a temperate breeding habitat and a tropical overwintering habitat. Birds migrate to tropical regions because winter is too harsh and food is plentiful further south. Birds migrate back to these breeding grounds to take advantage of abundant food supply in spring and summer. They also return because reproductive rates are better with larger clutches, more broods per season, less predation, and fewer parasites.

In Pennsylvania, waterfowl migration peaks in mid-March as these birds arrive in large flocks to open water and abundant food, some to remain here and others to migrate further north. Their colorful breeding plumage makes them easier to identify. Look for tundra swans, common loons, and common mergansers.

Directions to next stop:

- Turn left out of parking lot to return to PA 711
- Turn left onto PA 711 North
- Drive approximately 2.4 miles to Stahlstown and turn right onto PA 130 East
- Drive three miles and turn right onto PA 381 South



Indigo Bunting

Gas, ATMs, and restrooms are available in Donegal, Bakersville, and Normalville. **ATMs and restrooms** are available in Ohiopyle but no gas.

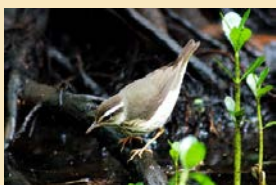
Information on the **dining and lodging options** available at Donegal, Ligonier, Somerset, Trent, and Ohiopyle can be found at:
www.laurelhighlands.org
www.ligonier.com
www.mountainlaurelchamber.com
www.somersetcountychamber.com
www.ohiopyle.info

Information on **cabin rentals** at Linn Run State Park and Ohiopyle State Park or **camping** in Forbes State Forest, Laurel Hill State Park, and Ohiopyle State Park can be found at:
<http://www.dcnr.pa.gov/StateParks/FindAPark/LinnRunStatePark/Pages/Stay.aspx>

<http://www.dcnr.pa.gov/StateParks/FindAPark/OhiopyleStatePark/Pages/Stay.aspx>

<http://www.dcnr.pa.gov/StateParks/FindAPark/LaurelHillStatePark/Pages/Stay.aspx>

<http://www.dcnr.pa.gov/StateForests/FindAForest/Forbes/Pages/Camping.aspx>



Louisiana Waterthrush

- Drive 2.7 miles and turn right onto Hunters Lane (gravel road) just before the sign for Forbes State Forest
- Cross a concrete bridge over Indian Creek and pull off in the small grassy area to the left near the trail head (Blair Brothers Railroad Trail). Do NOT block gate access

Stop Two - Forbes State Forest - Hunter's Lane

The early-stage, brushy habitat in the Hunters Lane Area is the largest of this type in the 60,000-acre Forbes State Forest and is a magnet for various species of wildlife, especially birds. This area is easily accessible by hiking the flat 1.25-mile Blair Brothers Railroad Trail, starting from Hunters Lane near the bridge over Indian Creek.

In the early stages of forest succession, many small tree seedlings and saplings mix with shrubs and grasses to create thick dense undergrowth valued by wildlife like deer, bear, and many species of birds. They are attracted to the cover this habitat provides which conceals their nests, offspring, or themselves from predators or even humans like yourself.

Walk quietly along the trail, stopping to look and listen. Birds you might see include the indigo bunting, common yellowthroat, gray catbird, ruffed grouse, blue-winged warbler, or American goldfinch. You may even catch a glimpse of a great-blue heron as it travels to and from Indian Creek.

Many birds also prefer and need this brushy habitat for the abundant food it provides, such as insects and caterpillars in the summer and soft berries in the fall and winter.

Directions to next stop:

- Return to PA 381
- Turn left onto PA 381 North and drive approximately five miles
- Turn left into parking area for Powdermill Nature Reserve

Stop Three – Powdermill Nature Reserve

Established in 1956, Powdermill Nature Reserve covers nearly 2,200 acres and is a biological research station for the Carnegie Museum of Natural History. Their world-renowned bird banding station, established in 1961, is one of the longest, continually-operating avian research stations in the United States.

Bird banders record physical characteristics of various bird species to monitor populations in the wild. Information gathered increases our understanding of bird behavior, migration, and life spans and is used to determine habitat use and presence of environmental toxins. Bird Banding Demonstrations are offered on weekends, April through November. Call 724-583-7521 for information.

The research on the Louisiana waterthrush done at Powdermill is used to determine the ecological health of the watershed. One of the earliest warblers to arrive in the spring, it is unique for its specific habitat requirements of forested, fast-flowing streams and a primary diet of aquatic macroinvertebrates. In addition, waterthrushes tend to return to the same stream each year, often reusing the same nests.



Scarlet tanager



Wood thrush



Skunk cabbage



Ovenbird



Trillium

This study is important for watershed management since these streams drain the majority of the watershed and influence downstream water quality. Watersheds with no or low populations of Louisiana waterthrushes may indicate poor water quality.

Explore the education center to learn more about birds and current research. To participate in one of the bird banding demonstrations given on the weekends, call 724-583-7521.

Directions to next stop:

- Turn left out of parking lot and continue on PA 381 North to Rector
- Turn right onto Linn Run Road and follow into Linn Run State Park
- Drive approximately 3.3 miles and turn right into the parking area for the Grove Run Trail Picnic Area
- Follow a portion of the trail for a short hike

Stop Four - Linn Run State Park - Grove Run Trail

Linn Run State Park and adjacent Forbes State Forest have been a destination for hikers, anglers, and birders for more than a century.

The Grove Run Trail located near two popular, natural artesian springs is a four-mile trail climbing over 1,000 feet through mature forest. Sturdy shoes are recommended as you walk 100 yards to enter the forest interior to discover the birds that live there.

Many bird species need interior forests to survive. This deep, unbroken forest is a secluded environment with a closed canopy, dense understory, and mature trees, providing preferred food and nesting conditions. Warblers and vireos eat large quantities of forest insects including gypsy moth and tent caterpillars. Other forest birds thrive in this habitat with fewer predators and less disturbance for nesting. In fact, one out of every six scarlet tanagers worldwide flocks to the forests of Pennsylvania during the breeding season!

Look for wood thrush, red-eyed vireo, blackburnian warbler, pileated woodpecker, ovenbird, and scarlet tanager. Each of these bird species has a unique song which fills the air while you journey along the trail.

Directions to next stop:

- Pull out of the picnic area parking lot and turn right to continue on Linn Run Road up Laurel Mountain into Forbes State Forest. After approximately four miles, this road becomes a gravel road
- Follow this road to Laurel Summit State Park and turn left into parking area
- From parking area, hike the one-quarter mile long trail to Spruce Flats Bog



Blackburnian warbler



Rose-breasted grosbeak



Coltsfoot



Common raven



Pitcher plant

Stop Five – Spruce Flats Bog

The 28-acre Spruce Flats Bog is part of the 300-acre Spruce Flats Wildlife Area of Forbes State Forest. Hike the one-quarter-mile Bog Trail from the parking area at Laurel Summit State Park to the boardwalk at the end of the trail that reaches out into the bog.

Past geologic activity left a depression on top of Laurel Ridge. This depression passed through natural succession from open water to swamp, to bog, to meadow, and finally to forest. Lumbering of the forest caused the water table to rise while fires burned away the upper layers of organic matter. These events recreated the bog.

This upland bog is unique to the area. The limited nutrients, acidic soils, and large amounts of organic matter support plants that are typically found further north including large cranberry, cotton grass, and the insect-eating pitcher plant and sundew. Likewise, certain bird species not found in the surrounding hardwood forest prefer the marshy openings and evergreen trees of this bog area.

Keep alert and you might catch a glimpse or hear the call of a yellow-billed cuckoo, common raven, rose-breasted grosbeak, red-tailed hawk, veery, hooded warbler, or winter wren.

Spring Ephemerals

Late April and early May bring the bountiful blossoms that indicate winter's end. The cool, moist climate of the forest provides a perfect landscape for the early flowers of this season, known as spring ephemerals. These flowers must grow quickly to take advantage of the abundant sunlight on the forest floor. In a few short weeks the tree leaves will completely shade the ground and the flowers will rest for another year. Look for trilliums, skunk cabbage, may apples, and coltsfoot as you drive to your next stop.

Directions to next stop:

- Turn right out of parking area to return back on Linn Run Road
- Bear left onto Hickory Flats Road (gravel road) and drive 3.8 miles
- Turn left at stop sign onto Old Hickory Flat Road (gravel road) and drive a short distance.
- Turn right at "T" at stop sign onto Rocky Ridge Road
- Drive a short distance until you see the turnpike on your right. Turn right at stop sign onto Bakersville-Edie Road, cross the bridge over the turnpike and bear to the right
- Drive 3.4 miles to Bakersville and turn left by the church at the stop sign at the "T" intersection
- Drive to the stop sign at intersection with PA 31
- Turn left onto PA 31 East
- Drive 0.3 miles and turn right onto Trent Road
- Drive 1.6 miles and turn right into Laurel Hill State Park
- Follow park road for approximately one mile to the bridge and parking area at the bottom of the hill



Wild columbine



*Ruby-throated hummingbird
feeding on Oswego tea*



Eastern bluebird



Eastern towhee



Common loon

Stop Six – Laurel Hill State Park – Laurel Hill Creek Bridge

Laurel Hill State Park comprises nearly 4,000 acres and shares a border with Forbes State Forest. Wildflowers occur here both naturally and as a part of the garden plantings by staff and volunteers.

The large flower bed near the bridge is planted with wild columbine. This flower blooms from late April through early June. Its red and yellow flowers attract hummingbirds.

The flowering time for this plant is particularly important because it is in full bloom when the ruby-throated hummingbird is migrating back to this area from the Yucatan Peninsula of Mexico. This tiny bird is a nocturnal migrant that can reach flight speeds of 60 mph. The flower provides a much-needed food source after the lengthy, non-stop flight over the Gulf of Mexico and benefits from the pollination provided by the hummingbird. Look for the iridescent flash of color among the flowers as the ruby-throat feeds on nectar and the small insects needed for protein.

Across the stream along the hillside above picnic area #4 is a large stand of naturally occurring Oswego tea, also known as scarlet bee-balm. This red flower also attracts hummingbirds and butterflies during its bloom in July and August.

Directions to the next stop:

- Continue to follow park road for approximately 2.2 miles to the park visitor center and turn right into parking area

Stop Seven – Laurel Hill State Park – Visitor Center/Meadow

The meadow located across the road from the park visitor center provides an excellent chance to get up close to many beautiful native wildflowers.

Walking trails throughout the meadow lead you through lovely native grasses and wildflowers that provide food for multiple species of birds. Daisies, coreopsis, and purple coneflower thrive in the meadow, attracting finches, cardinals, sparrows, and towhees when they produce seeds in the late summer and early fall.

This meadow surrounded by open woodlands is a perfect location for a bluebird trail – a trail of bluebird boxes that is part of a volunteer-run cavity-nesting program hosted in many Pennsylvania state parks. The program was originally created to help increase the declining eastern bluebird population due to loss of habitat and the use of pesticides. Bluebirds are primarily insect eaters that forage for grasshoppers, crickets, and other insects found here. Only partially migratory, the northern most bluebirds will fly to the southern United States for the winter and return here to nest for the breeding season.

The meadow and visitor center gardens are successful because of the dedication of volunteers. Stop in the Laurel Hill Visitor Center to learn more about the park and volunteer opportunities.



Mountain laurel



Osprey



Tree swallows



Northern parula



Yellow-rumped warbler

Mountain Laurel

As you get closer to Cranberry Lake, notice the distinctive pink and white flowers of mountain laurel commonly found on the rocky hilltops. On May 5, 1933, Governor Pinchot designated the mountain laurel as Pennsylvania's state flower. This evergreen shrub grows four to ten feet in height and is one of the few evergreen shrubs native to Pennsylvania. Here in the Laurel Highlands, this shrub blooms late May through early June.

Directions to next stop:

- Turn right out of visitor center parking area and follow the park road to the intersection with County Line Road
- Turn left onto County Line Road. County Line Road becomes Copper Kettle Highway when you cross the bridge over Laurel Hill Creek. Drive a short distance
- Turn right onto Barron Church Road (across from Trent House) and drive 3.8 miles
- Turn right onto Scullton Road/PA 653 West and drive approximately 3.5 miles
- Turn left onto Kanaul Road and drive one-half mile
- Turn right onto Sandy Run Road (gravel road) and drive 2.7 miles
- Turn left onto Anglers Road (gravel road)
- Anglers Road becomes Cranberry Road at the bridge. Continue straight for 1.5 miles
- Turn right into the parking area

Stop Eight – Cranberry Glade Lake/State Game Lands 111

When prevailing winds hit the ridge, the resulting updrafts provide optimum conditions for raptors soaring and gliding during migration. Prevailing winds along the ridge also make this an ideal location for the Mill Run Wind Project seen here. The 10 wind turbines provide power for 5,000 homes.

Located at an elevation of 2,297 feet, Cranberry Glade Lake is a 112-acre reservoir that averages four feet deep. This lake is owned by the Pennsylvania Game Commission as part of the 10,520-acre State Game Lands 111 and is managed by the PA Fish and Boat Commission.

Dead trees within the water at the northern end of the lake provide nesting and roosting sites for several bird species including the osprey and tree swallow. The osprey's large nests can be used year after year and are made of twigs and lined with bark, moss, and grasses. Look for these birds as they hover over the water in search of fish, and dive feet first to grab their prey. Tree swallows use holes in dead trees for their nests made of grasses and lined with feathers. Watch for these birds as they feed on insects caught in flight.

Ospreys, tree swallows, and some other bird species will build nests in man-made structures such as platforms or nest boxes. Look for osprey nest platforms, nearby purple martin houses, and duck boxes.



Birds and Brew

Coffee is a shade loving plant found in the understory of tropical forests. As coffee demand increases, so does the need for production. Higher yield coffee plantations using plants that tolerate full sun are replacing tropical forests.

Shade grown coffee is produced using the traditional technique of leaving the tropical forests intact and growing coffee in the shade below. This provides habitat for wildlife, prevents soil erosion, reduces the use of chemicals, and pulls carbon from the atmosphere. Birds breeding in North America and overwintering in Central and South America (sometimes in the same habitats as coffee) are known as neotropical migrants.



Consider protecting bird habitat by purchasing shade grown coffee to take home - available at Powdermill Nature Reserve, Barb's Country Store in Rector near Linn Run State Park, and Ohiopyle State Park Office. If you can't find shade grown coffee at your local coffee shop, order it online at www.birdsandbeans.com.

Directions to next stop:

- Turn right out of parking lot to continue on Cranberry Road. Drive approximately 2.2 miles (paved portion of road begins after ½ mile)
- At stop sign, turn right onto Jersey Hollow Road and drive 3.2 miles
- Turn left onto Maple Summit Road and drive four miles
- Turn left onto PA 381 South
- Drive 1.8 miles and turn right into parking area at Ferncliff and walk five minutes along Great Allegheny Passage to the High Bridge

Stop Nine - Ohiopyle State Park - Ferncliff High Bridge

From the Ferncliff Parking lot at the trailhead sign, head to the right on the Great Allegheny Passage trail and walk five minutes along the trail for a bird's eye view of the Youghiogheny River Gorge.

Ohiopyle State Park encompasses 20,500 acres including mature forests and 14 miles of the pristine Youghiogheny River flowing through the heart of the park. It is a natural history gem, perfect for birders and plant enthusiasts alike.

As you step onto the High Bridge, you enter the world of wood warblers. These tiny songbirds travel from winter grounds in the tropics to the forests of North America. They follow the emergence of hatching insects along their path, as tiny caterpillars awake from hibernation, the birds migrate northward. Male warblers are brightly colored to attract females while their mate's feathers are green and yellow, designed to blend with their forest canopy home. Many warblers spend most of their time feeding in the canopy. On the High Bridge, you have the perfect opportunity to see them in this unique setting. Look for northern parula, yellow-rumped warbler, yellow-breasted chat, and cerulean warblers.

A late May trip to the high bridge is not to be missed. The tulip poplar trees, a member of the magnolia family, are in bloom. This spectacle is hard to view from the ground but from here, this spectacular display is at eye level.

Directions to next stop:

- Turn left out of parking area and return to intersection with PA 381
- Turn left onto PA 381 North
- Drive approximately 10.4 miles to Normalville and turn right to continue north on PA 381/711
- Drive approximately 9.5 miles and turn left at blinking light onto PA 711/31 West
- Drive approximately two miles to return to Donegal

Join us on Facebook at: <https://www.facebook.com/visitPAparks> or <https://www.facebook.com/PAForests> and post photos and comments about your experiences on the tour!